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Charles Heseltine Correspondence

Charles Dana Heseltine 1911-1989

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445 Preble Street
South Portland, Maine
May 29, 1969

Maine State Library
Augusta, Maine

Attention: Mrs. F. W. Jacobs

Dear Madam:

Your letter is the third in reference to a copy of the history of the street railway lines within the City of South Portland that I have received. Did not see the article so must assume the report was misleading which is about par for the course.

I have been collecting pictures and historical data of the street railway lines of the State of Maine since 1920 with more than 2,500 photographs in my collection covering cars, barns, resorts, wrecks, rights of way, etc.

During the last dozen or so years have been putting my thoughts down on paper and working up typescripts covering various local trolley lines and donating them to local libraries and/or local historical societies such as at Yarmouth, Gorham, Windham, Falmouth, Kenduskeag Village, Berwick, Eliot, the Bangor Historical and Public Libraries and so on.

These are all typescripts and have not been published although I did have an offer of an advance of fifteen hundred dollars from friends connected with Bangor Historical to finance the publication of the material I have amassed on the Bangor system which was the first electric street railway in the Pine Tree state and one of the very first in New England. As the distribution of this proposed publication would have posed a problem and I would have worried until sufficient sales had been made to repay this proffered kindness, I felt it best to refuse with thanks.

The South Portland trolley lore effort was of the same type going into considerable detail on the local system of which I have much knowledge of this road from having made use of it over the years. It included many photos from my collection and copies of timetables, maps, etc. etc. There was only the one copy, the historical details coming from my own personal master copy of notes which covers in detail the history of each of the more than fifty street railways which have operated within our state.


I am certain that you are acquainted with O. R. Cummings of Manchester, New Hampshire and his fine books covering the history of many of our State of Maine trolley lines. Mr. Cummings has long been a close personal friend of mine and several of his trolley histories have been based on data in my files. As he is a newspaper editor and has much time to do additional research it has always been my pleasure to turn over to him anything which might be of assistance to him in putting these facts into print. (Currently he is about to bring out a history of the trolley lines along the Kennebec Valley including Augusta, Gardiner, Togus, Winthrop, etc.) Last fall I took a guided tour over the Augusta-Winthrop route with an old timer who pointed out each and every detail of the run, and permitting me to work up a very accurate map of the region. While Mr. Cummings works cover the history of any entire street railway, I attempt to embellish my typescripts with local information pertaining to the locality about which I am writing.

Took my retirement from the South Portland Fire Department as chief of the fire prevention bureau three years ago and the following Monday joined the staff of the Maine Historical Society as a full time employee which was somewhat like turning a youngster loose in a candy factory as you may well imagine!

Realizing that there has been no published account of the steam railroads of our state, I took a vacation from my beloved trolley cars two winters ago and delved into the various annual reports, Railroad Commissioners records, etc. in MHS and worked up a typescript for them which covers each and every steam railroad which has operated within the State of Maine. A man named Chase brought out such a book some time back and I am certain your library has copies, but he overlooked a number of smaller roads. Since his book was published in the twenties, much of the branch line roads have been abandoned, all of the narrow gauge and one completely new railroad has been constructed. I have also been able to obtain the history of the 8-10 lumber railroads of Maine which were not covered by the Railroad Commission and about which Chase says nothing.

So, outside of a few magazine articles in such publications as Railroad Magazine and a couple now and then in the feature section of the Portland Sunday Telegram, I must confess to not exactly being an author which is well read.

Do appreciate your interest, however and please keep me in mind in the event you may need any material on the street railway lines of Maine as it is always so much fun to share one's hobby.

Sincerely yours,

CHARLES D. HESELTINE

PS: A few generations back our family name was spelled the same as that of your Librarian so we are probably twenty-second cousins. Geneology tells me it was originally "Hazelden" meaning people living on the side of a hill planted with hazel bushes back in dear old Devon. How about that?!